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James Earl Ray sues U.S., Illinois deputy

James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has filed a civil rights and libel suit against the U.S. Department of Justice and a Madison County sheriff's deputy.

The suit filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court here alleges that various employees of the Justice Department and Madison County Sheriff's Deputy Conrad "Pete" Baetz, a former investigator for the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations, provided "false and poisonous" allegations about Ray to news media.

In the petition, Ray offers to waive the statute of limitations and other protections he may have in order to stand trial on the criminal offenses he said the Justice Department has accused him of through the press. The only condition mentioned in the petition is that the government refrain from calling as witnesses convicts and ex-convicts from Missouri or Tennessee prison systems.

Ray asked the court to order the Justice Department to present evidence of criminal acts it alleges he committed, and to award him $25,000 in actual damages and $50,000 in punitive damages against Baetz.

The House committee said after its investigation of the King assassination that Ray and his brother, John Larry Ray, may have robbed an Alton bank in 1967 to finance the King slaying.